



EPISODE 3 – HOW TO STAGE A MISSING PLAY

TOM Hey everyone, and welcome to Episode 3 of the Chorus Project podcast. I'm Tom, Artistic Director of Upstart Theatre in London, and I'll be your host as we speak to artists, activists, change-makers, and citizens across Europe.

First of all, I wanted to say thanks so much to everyone who's listened and shared the podcast so far, it means so much to have you listening in. And if you're new to the podcast, then welcome, it's great to have you with us and I really hope you enjoy this episode.

So, this podcast is part of *The Chorus Project*, an international theatre project inspired by the *Oresteia*, which is the only surviving trilogy of tragedies from ancient Greece. It's a collaboration between Pathos Theatre in Munich, the MKC Youth Cultural Centre in Skopje, Upstart Theatre in London and Birmingham, and Theater am Lend in Graz. And for this episode, I sat down with the playwright and director Christian Winkler, who's directing and writing the Austrian part of the project. I had a great time talking to Christian about his work, his vision for the show, and loads more, so we're going to jump right in with this conversation. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did!

Transition music.

TOM So Christian, do you want to maybe start us off by just talking a little bit about how you came to be involved in The Chorus Project?

CHRISTIAN Yes. Um I. So I work as a director and as a playwright, I work as a director and under the pseudonym uh Franz von Strolchen, this is actually my my name as a director. And I also write plays as Christian Winkler, which is the playwright's, or my real name. And I think I've worked for the past twelve, fifteen years in theatre in various contexts. So I started quite traditionally working in national theatres, after having studied here in London actually, at Goldsmith's, and having had my free kind of company and independent company, and then I after, I think last year we met in, I did a project in Munich with my company which is also called Franz von Strolchen. And with this company we did a co-production between the Pathos Theatre in Munich and the Theater am Lend in Graz, and

also with the Hamburg theatre. It was a co-production and for this production, I met Angelika from the Pathos Theater and we started talking about things and, and also because I've been working in Macedonia as a director as well at the National Theatre there. I worked with Ivica, who is now the partner here, as a director in my project. I've worked with him so far in three projects. He was always the actor in the projects. Now he's directing but he's also directing movies and stuff. And he's got his own band and everything so. So I kind of brought - not brought people together but I recommended him and his company to Angelica. And so that's how it came together.

TOM Yeah. I'm really enjoying the kind of - because people keep asking me 'So how do you come to work with all these people?' and then you have, this whole thing is like 'well I met these guys on Facebook like four years ago and then we did the show together. And then, yeah. Then we met these other guys and we just thought hey what the hell. Let's do this thing.'

CHRISTIAN It's not - it's really like it's a bit of a coincidence.

TOM Yes.

CHRISTIAN And that's what's interesting. I think that's, that's always the best kind of connections I think. It's not planned, it's not, it's quite organically grown somehow, and you know people and you recommend people and you say well and work together and you meet and then. I think the two of us we met I think four years, was it four years ago?

TOM It was wasn't it.

CHRISTIAN I think in Munich when we talked about it first, yeah. So I think from there on, we kind of, kind of evolved and now it's this kind of group of people who are kind of fixed and we meet.

TOM Yeah. We have these meetings where we drink a lot of coffee and read plays in many languages.

CHRISTIAN Yes. Yeah. Yes it's great. I like working like that because it's, it's always this kind of intercultural connections which interest me actually most in my work as well. I work mainly with international casts, with international crew and everything, so it's always people from different countries coming together working on one thing but with their individual backgrounds.

TOM So what is it about the *Oresteia* in particular, and the Chorus Project that speaks to you the most? What do you feel animated by in this project?

CHRISTIAN I think, I have - lately I've become more and more interested in cultural identity, and especially in the European cultural identity, and I feel like that something like *Oresteia* is, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of the history of a culture. So basically Greek, Greek and ancient Greek plays and dramas that kind of shaped the way we are today, or we are seeing culture today, the way we perceive movies for example. I think that comes from a long history of dramatists, and about ways of thinking, philosophers, and then that dates back like almost two and a half thousand years. And so I think that's that's kind of the cradle of the culture, of European identity and European culture. So I think from that point of view I find it a very interesting piece of work, but also in terms of where this European identity is going in the future and especially lately. I mean coming from Austria, there is a really immense right-wing tendency at the moment. And if you look to Britain obviously it's similar. For different reasons but similar kind of atmospheres coming out of various reasons I think. It's not just because of migration or so, it's about it's, I feel like it stems, it comes from a far deeper background which is obviously the capitalist, capitalistic ideas and movements of the past hundred years almost now starting to have its effects, but also combined with that colonialism - which is in Britain obviously also a big topic - but not enough talked about topic yet I think. And all these things now start changing and if we somehow came to a point where it's almost like everything could happen from now on again, do you know what I mean?

TOM Tell me more about that.

CHRISTIAN So I don't I don't know what's going to happen, but I think it's - we are in an almost like crossroads now.

TOM Right.

CHRISTIAN So it's like we could go we could go all in the wrong direction, or we might be able to change everything around now. And I think we have to do it now. In the next few years I think, so it's a very short short-term plan that we need.

TOM Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTIAN Because the long-term plan has, obviously has gone wrong, I think, somehow. And if you look at the way the European Union is, has shaped in the past 40-50 years, I think it's - it was a really great idea, and I love the idea, and still love the idea, and I still believe in the ideal very much. But I think there were some, some mistakes were made, I think, and some wrong turns have been taken. And from that point of view I think we need, somehow, we need to turn the ship around somehow.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN But I don't know. I don't really know which direction it should go, but I have the – it's just sometimes, as an artist you always have the feeling of something in the air, and you feel like there is something going on. And I have the feeling it's not all bad. I don't think it's all bad. I don't think, it's not going to. It's not going to completely turn – I hope not at least – it's not going to completely turn into a kind of a post-apocalyptic scenario of war or hunger and diseases or something like that, because there are people who kind of anticipate that as well.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN But I don't think it's gonna be like that. I think it's going to - I think it's, there's still a chance to take it and move it to somewhere else.

TOM Do you want to tell us a bit about what your current plans are, maybe, as the playwright. So as Christian?

CHRISTIAN So we are doing the fourth part, which doesn't exist. So it's, we know of three parts of the *Oresteia*. And we know there's been, there was a fourth part. Out of tradition we know that there must have been a - the satyr play. But it's not - I did a lot of – not a lot, but I did the research and researched it for a while and tried to find even pieces, or I tried to find maybe that somebody has some at one point found some hints of what the fourth part could have been.

TOM Mmm.

CHRISTIAN I didn't find anything. There is satyr plays for other, other Greek plays. But for this one, it doesn't exist anymore. And the idea was to...what I liked about the idea as a playwright obviously is that there is a play that has been written but it's not, the text is not there anymore. So, me as a playwright, I can now rewrite or write this play from the start.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN But at the same time with the history and with the tradition of these satyr plays in mind. And so that's, that was the starting point, so how can you reconstruct something that everybody knows it was there and it existed once, but nobody really knows what it what it was.

TOM Right.

CHRISTIAN And nobody can be sure. So we, we assume it would, it followed the structure of all the other satyr plays that followed this, had the same function as all this other sort of satyr plays, and we assume. And all the scientists [researchers] around it, they are, I have to

say that they are of the same opinion that it should be like that. But actually, nobody knows, and it could have been very, very different.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And let's just, let's let's just think about it, it probably was not. But, but maybe it was a really crazy satyr play that nobody could anticipate, or could know about how crazy it was or how absurd, or how it was breaking with the traditions.

TOM Right, yeah.

CHRISTIAN And if you think about that it's quite, it's a quite open playing field I think, which is really interesting for a playwright especially. So, you can reinvent something that everybody knows. So, everybody has a kind of anticipation, or anticipates something of this text, but you can break this anticipation because you can say 'What if it was completely different?'. And so, I started to think about reconstruction processes. And in art, for example, reconstruction is a very usual thing. So, if you think about painting or so, it's very common to kind of reconstruct paintings that are that are kind of faded away or that the parts are kind of, have been destroyed. That it's a very common thing that a painter nowadays comes up and very meticulously paints of it and tries to reconstruct the painting. Also with languages we do the same, we try to reconstruct languages which have been lost and we try to come up with, we try to follow certain systems that we know, which reconstruct a language that has been dead for maybe a thousand years or so.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN The same thing with architecture. So we reconstruct buildings. I think the most current example would be Notre Dame, for example.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN It's just burned down, the roof's burned down. So part, parts of the art has been lost and there is obviously a very emotional reaction to this building, especially in France obviously. And so they try and - immediately I think only hours later - they were announcing we are going to rebuild it.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN We reconstruct it. And so I was asking the question, if you reconstruct something that that's been there forever - at least from the from the emotional feeling forever - if you reconstruct something, how do you reconstruct it? Do you reconstructed as it was, exactly as it was in pictures for example, and with Notre Dame it's quite easy to

reconstruct it completely as it was? Or do you reconstruct it with the with the, with the fire in this case or with the with the accident in mind?

TOM Mm-hmm.

CHRISTIAN So, do you make a mark somewhere and say 'uh here was the fire, and we reconstructed it from here on with the with the idea in mind that we know there was a fire'?. Or do we, do we erase the fire? Totally. So it never happened basically. So what I am interested in is in in a cultural practice that makes the marks visible.

TOM Mmm.

CHRISTIAN And also, I think in this, that also goes for the satyr play to make, it as we talked earlier, to say 'OK this is a cultural heritage almost. But we have to reconstruct it. How do we reconstruct it with us nowadays in mind?'

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN I think, that's the conclusion I came up with somehow. So, so that's the that's the background basically.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And the form of the play at the moment stands as follows, that it's a - that we we tried to work with, with reconstructing from memory basically. And with that we're also going to work with older people, elderly people, who are more, kind of, who have this - it's not a problem, but have this state of trying to remember the past a little bit more than young people. I mean, obviously if you're 30 you still do also try to remember when you were 10 or so, and the way you reconstruct your past is probably a fictional construction somehow always, or it's something that your parents told you about yourself and that's why your memory starts thinking it was like that but it was actually completely different.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And I think also with older people that you have always these discussions of - 'Do you remember this that they when we were there in there and we went together had coffee in this bar' and then the other person says 'no it was not that we never we never did that actually. You must remember it wrong'. And I think this, this reconstructive process from memory is quite interesting. And, and also if you think it on a greater scale, which also I'm interested in again coming from Austria, and having this in the background with the second world war, with the Holocaust. And I think the problem here in Austria, the Holocaust is a big neglect somehow.

TOM Right.

CHRISTIAN So either it's, they they kind of tried, Austrian society has somehow managed to drive, to go around the problem of that historical past. And, and unlike Germany where the Holocaust has been discussed a lot in schools and forums and in politics even, Austria has somehow, it's steered away from that. Very strangely I think. Even to the point, for example there just last year was announced with the right-wing government, they kind of cancelled all remembrance, remembering services to the Holocaust.

TOM Right.

CHRISTIAN It's a very small thing. It's not it's that - maybe they were, let's say 50 people applying for remembering service, like I did for example when I was 18. So they don't send any any young people anymore to Holocaust museums.

TOM Right.

CHRISTIAN Not to Poland for example, to Germany, to the Holocaust Centre in New York for example. There are always people going there, but they have been sent by the Austrian government in order to remember something, and be there as a remembrance kind of symbol almost.

TOM Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTIAN So people came from abroad and you were there, and you told people from Canada, maybe even people who had been victims of the Holocaust, who were survivors. They came there and you said 'Oh I'm here for remembering the past, and I mean I want to make sure that I go back to and talk, tell my generation that something like that never happens again.' And I think it's a really horrible situation that the government just silently erases this kind of service, which is admittedly a very small thing but it's a very important political thing I think. And if you think about that, about how remembering, how a government shapes the national collective memory of a whole nation basically. Then I think this project, or this satyr play goes in this direction, to how do you actually make a collective memory? How do you recreate something from memory, and what do you leave out, and what do you put in?

CHRISTIAN So that's I think, these are all these meta levels I'm really interested in.

TOM Yeah, it's kind of sitting there....

CHRISTIAN Yeah, yeah

TOM Is there a shape that that your that your company, that your characters, that your play is trying to rebuild? Is there like a Platonic ideal that they're reaching for in this show, do you think? Or is it more that the act of, the act of recreation, the act of restoration is what the show is about for you?

CHRISTIAN I think it's about the decision making process -

TOM - right -

CHRISTIAN - that the decision-making process that goes, that comes from the audience in the end, that will come from the audience. So how do a group of people, like let's say a hundred audience members. How do they come to a conclusion, or how do they, how did they create a collective memory? And how, by democratic principles, basically.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And that's what I, when I come back to the example of Austria and Holocaust it's the same thing, because we vote for a party that eliminates the memory of something for example, or the possibility to remember something, and that's the same thing. So, a group of people democratically chooses to make a collective memory.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And I think the interesting part is, the form will be that the people have to make choices how to, what they think the satyr play once was. So, they have to make choices to say 'Okay I think the first, it started like this' and they have a, obviously they will get a list of choices or of some choices, it's not completely random. But they, but the way they interpret these choices that we give them is basically every time completely different. So just for an example, maybe it's easier to go with examples, is to, if you think about it you have a number, your number is being called, you are the voter basically; you say, okay this is a, you get a little piece of paper where it says 'Please go on stage and do something that you always wanted to do on this stage', for example.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And then this person can make a choice. He or she can go on stage and do nothing, just stand there for five minutes. Or she can, he or she can destroy the stage, he or she can make a monologue out of nothing. Whatever. You know, that that could be anything.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And then there be more made might be more concrete choices, like take a chair and to do something with that chair. Or play a scene together with the actor on stage. Or use the actor and instruct him very briefly to do a scene. And I think, because they're not professionals, the audience. I think the way they will, that it will be quite, sometimes quite chaotic, I think, what's going to be there on stage. But I think that's interesting, because as soon as it starts becoming chaotic, the other people in the audience will have a meaning. Will have a, they will have in their heads their, what they would have done instead.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN I mean if they had received this piece of paper with that instruction, what would they have done?

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And I think just looking at something and always thinking 'I would have done it differently', is for me the core of democracy. Do you know what I mean?

TOM Looking at something and going 'I would have done it differently'...

CHRISTIAN Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Because that's what, because you look at, you vote for politicians.

TOM Uh-huh.

CHRISTIAN And then you let them do something and then you always say, 'I would have done it differently'. And the old politicians, or like football clubs, you know, the football fans are the better football - or the, not the better football players, but they are the players who would have would have known, or not the players but the managers, who would have known everything better. All the time.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And so it's always easy. And then I think you start realizing how how common and how easy it looks from the outside, from this kind of very safe spot, and look at democratic processes played out, and always say 'I would have done it differently'. But then when it's your turn and you are on stage and you get this instruction on the piece of paper, then I think you will realize 'oh no it's actually much more difficult than it looked'.

TOM Yeah

CHRISTIAN Because when I was sitting outside I would, I had thousands of ideas of what they have could have done originally and interestingly, but when I - when it's my turn I'm, I'm lost. Do you know what I mean? And I think that's that's an interesting democratic process for me, in its own. And I think that's, that's the form of the show somehow.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN Together with obviously comments from the Chorus commenting on memory, reconstruction process and everything. But the core of the show will always be this kind of trying to collectively reconstruct something that never existed, or that that existed once but that we don't know of. But we don't have any um any proof.

TOM Yeah. Archaeology, but without a site to dig.

CHRISTIAN Exactly. But, but even more archaeology, where... where we dig in our, our creative minds. Not even on the site. Yeah.

TOM So I was going to ask - and I think you've kind of answered it already - but what does democracy mean to you? How would you define democracy?

CHRISTIAN Yeah. So I think, I don't know, what it is for me, it is something that, that is something has to do with identity for me again. So it's, when I get, when I know there is an election for example, then I try to make sure to get - even if I live abroad for example and I have to vote in Austria for example, because I'm an Austrian citizen - I try to get the letter, the letter voting systems, and so I get to that I can vote with letters, and I try to, and just for for a pure identity sake, I try to order these things much in advance, and try to make sure that it's my duty to -

TOM - right -

CHRISTIAN - to conform to my duty basically. And I think that's, that has for me it has to do with identity, because I think this is my responsibility, and I want to do it, I want to use the chance to be part of this process, but also because I think it's part of the cultural identity, I think that I don't want to lose or, I want to keep up somehow. And with this identity is not just the voting systems, it's all, everything else. It's languages, it's food, it's all about culture. So it's a part of our culture.

TOM So, politics or democratic politics it almost becomes like a cultural activity.

CHRISTIAN Yeah.

TOM So it's a thing that we do as well as -

CHRISTIAN - yes -

TOM - as watching football matches or going to the theatre -

CHRISTIAN - exactly -

TOM Or listening to music.

CHRISTIAN And we should, should do. And it's the same, as same, the same thing like, people always complain about 'Ah, the small butcher around the corner it's destroyed by chains' or something like that, and we try to rescue or to help them, and then to invest and go to those small chains - not small chains, the small markets again, and try to keep them up and keep this culture up.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN I think we also should keep the culture of going to elections up and democracy up, do you know what I mean?

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN So it's the same thing. I think it's not, it's - now it's become very kind of modern again to, to go against some big companies, like go and buy your books at the local bookshop and not on Amazon. In order to do that we don't lose libraries or bookshops in our perception. Because it's not because it's, because they need the money, because if we lose them, I think, then when we walk through the streets and we don't see any bookshops anymore then we don't know of books anymore. And I think the same applies to democracy basically if we don't go to vote and if we don't keep that idea up, then I think we lose our sight of democratic, democratic processes. Do you know what I mean?

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN So I think that's, that for me it's a cultural practice, it's something that we need to do and keep up somehow.

TOM And it's something that we do as citizens, as electors, as voters.

CHRISTIAN Yes. Yes.

TOM And just as humans, like, we need to be taking responsibility for that. Rather than the government grants us an election.

CHRISTIAN Yes. And it doesn't matter. I mean obviously we can also make the decisions to come up with a different system. We have that, some sort of freedom and we could come up with a different system and an even more detailed, or a kind of more balanced version of a system, it maybe will always be called democracy. If we do it together somehow.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And um, but I mean there are ideas, I mean there are also Greek ideas of the, of a society led by, for example by intellectuals, or a society that changes on a, like a, that changes the politicians, that everybody has to be a politician at one point in their life for example. There are these ideas around, and some of them sound very tempting and very interesting some that somehow. I'm not sure about the intellectuals as for politicians or for leaders, I'm not sure about this idea.

TOM I think it would be the worst idea - 'It could be this, it could be that...'

CHRISTIAN But I kind of like the idea of taking turns in making decisions. And that's what I, with this project I think, that's kind of that idea. That you are being put on the spot and say 'Okay now it's your time to make a decision.'

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And try to do it now.

TOM I find it really interesting that what you're talking about in the in the performance is that it's an individual's turn to make the decision. It doesn't sound like you're thinking, 'oh there should be a deliberative moment where we all decide together what we're going to do.'

CHRISTIAN Yeah.

TOM It's very much. 'Now you, it's your call, and then yours.'

CHRISTIAN 'Now you'. Yeah. But I think but I think it's informed, isn't it. That's - I don't know I haven't done it yet, it's an experiment - but I think what's gonna happen is that if you put somebody on the spot to do something, and you have 99 people in your back, I think that democratic processes start in these 99 per cent or 99 people, because they will start arguing with each other. If that person who is on the, if he or she is doing the right thing. And also, they will I think start discussing if the person now is destroying something that somebody else previously had.

TOM Yeah, right. Right.

CHRISTIAN If I start it, if I'm the first one does not take number one and it's the first scene and I do something that I have something in mind, the direction in mind. And then number two comes on and completely ignores my vision.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN Then I would maybe start stand up, 'Hey can you not do this because I tried to do this', you know. And then then the second person says, 'But no I don't want to do this, I have another different idea of this.' And then we have to start a discussion, or maybe not just an open, not even an open discussion. Maybe it will be a discussion just within the ranks of the audience. I mean it's just between two or three people.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And just [whispers]. So. And that that's I think that's interesting for me.

TOM I agree. I agree. Yeah. I told you I think a little bit when we were a few months ago, when we were in Skopje, about this thing that I'm building, this show that I'm making which is about making choices in what now is going to be in space.

CHRISTIAN It's in space.

TOM So it's it's all gonna be set on Mars now, and in the experiments that I've run on it so far some of the interesting, most interesting moments have been because it's all like, the building of that show is basically the audience are making choices about a story together it's like one of those - did you ever have these? Like the Choose Your Own Adventure books when you were a kid.

CHRISTIAN Yes. Yes. Where you skip to this -

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN - make this decision that I think is also with dice, is I think you were rolling dices and you were, had to skip to page number 30 or -

TOM Exactly, all that stuff like I, I used to love that.

CHRISTIAN Yeah me too. It was like it was. It was a lot of, how you call it, fantasy stories.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN With orcs and –

TOM Yeah, orcs and wizards, yeah. So I'm trying to make this slightly less geeky and say I just said it on Mars you know, catch-all.

CHRISTIAN Yeah.

TOM Because it is all. It's on a linear timeline. There is a fictional world that is built. But, yeah, I think the most fun kind of happens when someone's made decision number one and then someone comes and goes 'Actually you know I want to get rid of that, tear it all down and start again.' And like, when you're facilitating it, how much how much you want that happen and how much you know. Because in a way I'm try I'm trying to work on a linear, on a linear story, so I don't really want them to go back and go 'oh yeah but back in chapter 1. This should have happened.'

CHRISTIAN Yeah

TOM But I do really want them to go 'and then we did a policy U-turn and we went right back to the beginning'. I think that could be really fun.

CHRISTIAN But didn't you'll find these, when you go back to the books for example.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN Didn't you, I found it always, the process was much more interesting than the than the actual story that came out of it.

TOM Oh yeah. Yeah.

CHRISTIAN Because I was always, but it was not - it never ended, I had the feeling anyway. Because at one point it came back to something else again and so because that's the... I felt like the story itself to develop was never really that great.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN Because obviously how can it be? Because if you have five choices all of every five pages or so, and then you turn to something else the dramaturgy of it will - it's never going to be so precise so when you have one story obviously. But I liked always, I liked these books as well as a kid because I'd like the process and the excitement of choice.

TOM Yeah. And it almost doesn't matter.

CHRISTIAN Yeah it doesn't matter, exactly.

TOM I mean the thing that I mostly remember about those now, and I really need to, you know, go on eBay or something and see if I can get hold of some old ones. But I think that I really remember is like most of the choices were: 'and you die'.

CHRISTIAN Yes exactly, it was like a game, that was 'game over'.

TOM Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTIAN So go back a few chapters or start from the beginning.

TOM Yeah exactly. But it was sort like you can choose one, choice one or choice two, and choice one you're alive, choice two you're dead.

CHRISTIAN And that was the same, you know that was also in computer games there was, what's it called, adventure games.

TOM Oh yeah like text adventure games -

CHRISTIAN Yeah text adventure games, where you had to make all the choices I remember like Monkey Island or so, or Indiana Jones or something like that, where you had similar choices and there were, and there was sometimes there were moments where you just died, where you made a decision and then you - the game was over and you'd just died, and 'ah I have to go back again', and hopefully I had had saved this kind of state of the game where I could still make another decision. But I like the idea that there is, is it there on Mars? This kind of decision that you die. It should be!

TOM I don't know, maybe, like I so I sort of found that there was a previous interactive show that I made with a friend that was performed here actually at Shoreditch Town Hall. And that was all set during a fictional crisis in the Cold War. And in one of the kind of early conversations we had - so half the audience were set as like Americans and half as Russians - and we had this idea that it would be really cool if like there was like. You know one of those like, it's ten minutes to midnight, it's one minute to midnight, doomsday, the Doomsday Clock. And we had this idea that there was a Doomsday Clock and you could just. And the show would end, and nuclear war would happen. And we thought that just wouldn't be very satisfying if you were sort of half an hour in and you'd had a really great time. It's like 'it's the end of the show guys'. But I sort of feel like with this one. Yeah. Like I think it be quite cool if there were things that just go: 'And now all the oxygen has spilled out of the habitation units and, uh and everybody's died'.

CHRISTIAN Yeah. Yeah.

TOM 'But it's okay because we'll go back in time.'

CHRISTIAN Yes that will be funny, I think if it would be like 20 minutes into the show. And that will already happen after 20 minutes.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN And then and then it feels like 'oh no we have to go home all now, because we paid a for a ticket and now it's only a 20-minute show but it could have been a one and a half or two hours show'.

TOM Yeah. 'We could've been here all night -'

CHRISTIAN - yeah -

TOM 'but no we killed everybody.' I don't know. Like it's really interesting making that show alongside this, because I feel like, you know, it's about the practice of democracy.

CHRISTIAN Yeah.

TOM And in a way what we're what we're doing in Chorus for me feels like that the process is a very democratic, and the thinking about it is democratic, but I don't know if this show that I end up directing at the end will, will have both those elements. But what's really nice is that what you're doing, it feels like it will have all those elements and so that we're able to - we were talking yesterday about like this being a tree and all of the expressions of it being a different branch of the same tree.

CHRISTIAN I think I think you said that as well yesterday, I think as long as we, we kind of stick with the topic, and that we will do that because we have texts, or most of us have texts, that we have to stick to and we have to talk about. And even if you, if you choose to make her a chamber play out of one of the, or a soap opera out of one of the texts -

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN We'll still kind of feel the underlying topics I think. Maybe not as strong as it could be, but it's still there, I think. So it doesn't really matter, I think if you if you think about it. The only thing I think we could talk about more in this, in these the meetings to come is if, if we want the overall, umm experience of the audience, if they watch a marathon from four parts together, if this overall dramaturgy, if we can work together on that. Because on every single show I think that's, that's done. I think that's, I take it for granted that this will be, the underlying topic will be there I think.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN Maybe if we can, maybe can rearrange the four parts, or arrange the four parts in a way that there is some sort of logical kind of dramaturgy within these four parts together.

TOM Yeah I think it's going to be really interesting working it out. I mean I, as you know I kind of love the idea of the marathon performance. It feels like quite, when we were having the very first initial conversations about it, it was sort of part of the built-in logic of the project. But as we've started to develop everything of course, you know, that's it's becoming maybe less of a less of a kind of key priority?

CHRISTIAN Yes. But of course

TOM I mean like, you know, it is gonna be what it is but -

CHRISTIAN We don't know yet. So everybody listening now, it could be that, it could be that we have, there is a marathon it could be not, and maybe if there is not there's probably very pragmatic practical reasons to not be because I think everybody's liking the idea that there should be one.

TOM Yeah.

CHRISTIAN But maybe for artistic reasons or for mainly I think practical reasons too might not be possible. But we'll see.

TOM We'll see when we get to it. It's only April.

CHRISTIAN Yeah, we'll try to stick to the plan for at least, for as long as we can.

TOM Yeah and then throw it out the window and do something else. Christian, thanks so much for the chat.

CHRISTIAN Thank you.

TOM We'll talk again soon.

CHRISTIAN Sure. Thank you.

TOM Cheers.

Transition music

TOM

Thanks so much again to Christian for that conversation. We recorded this a little while ago, back at the Chorus Project London meeting at Shoreditch Town Hall, so it's really great to come back to it and hear some of those ideas again. The thing that's struck me the most as I've been editing the episode has been this idea that he has of democracy as a process that we take part in, as a cultural activity. As something that we do, not just as a social or a political responsibility but as part of who we are. So voting, for example, becomes a form of self-expression, and a way of demonstrating that you're part of a community. And that, for me, that ties into Christian's idea for the Satyr play as well; there's a sense in the way he talks about it that the making of the show is something that's done together, collectively, between the performers and the audience. So, from my point of view as a director, it feels like an act of really radical trust, a giving up of the kind of presumed authority of the playwright and director. Which is really exciting and kind of quite scary in some ways. I make a lot of interactive theatre work, but I feel like he's really opening up the stage for the audience. And I think it's also really demanding, really challenging to the audience, because they can't just sit in the theatre and let it all wash over them, but more than that, beyond that. From what Christian is saying the idea is that the audience aren't given any character or mask or role – instead, they're asked to give something of themselves. Which is kind of scary I think – even if its just for a few moments – but really, really exciting, and liberating for audiences and for the professional artists who'll be on stage with them alike. I really can't wait to see this one.

We talked at the end of the conversation about *Republic*, the new interactive show that I'm creating, set on Mars. If you liked the sound of it and you're near London, we're running the first public playtest of *Republic* at Draughts Boardgame Café near Waterloo Station on Tuesday 24th September. It'd be amazing to have you along! There are details on the Upstart Theatre website, www.upstart-theatre.co.uk.

That's all for this episode! Thanks so much for listening in, and see you next time.

Transition music.

TOM

Thank you for listening to The Chorus Project podcast. The podcast is presented and produced by me, Tom Mansfield, for Upstart Theatre, as part of The Chorus Project. The Chorus Project is part funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, and it's supported in the UK by the Unity Theatre Trust.

In the UK, Upstart Theatre is presenting our show *Beneath the City* as part of The Chorus Project. We'll be at Birmingham REP theatre from 16-18 January 2020, and tickets are available online now. You can find out more about The Chorus Project at www.upstart-theatre.co.uk.